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AUTHOR Gonzalez, Raquel-Amaya Martinez
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ABSTRACT

The involvement of parents in schools has been legislated in Spain since 1970, with the main activities being parents associations and school councils, but these partnerships do not represent a particularly friendly situation. A research project was carried out through the University of Oviedo, Spain, Department of Education, to create a mechanism for the exchange of ideas about parent-teacher partnership and education, including assessment of the school's cooperation needs. The setting was a well-organized school open to innovative programs, with good cooperation between parents and teachers, located in Gijon, Spain. The results based on the original objectives of the study, were achieved by means of a permanent school-based seminar with parents, teachers, children and a university coordinator to exchange ideas about parent-teacher partnerships and cooperation. Contributions of the project to the school were high, with a more positive attitude between parents and teachers and increased activities involving the community as major indicators. However, the project had a few limitations, mostly the dependence on the university facilitator and doubts as to the long-term effects to the school and generalization of issues to other schools. (SM)

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FAMILY-SCHOOL COOPERATION THROUGH ACTION-RESEARCH

Dra. Raquel-Amaya Martínez González
Departamento de CC. Educación. Universidad de Oviedo
España

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FAMILY-SCHOOL COOPERATION THROUGH ACTION-RESEARCH

Martínez González, Raquel-Amaya

University of Oviedo, Spain

Parents' involvement in schools has been legislated in Spain since 1970 throughout several Education Laws; the lastest one, LOGSE, has as one of its objectives to promote cooperation between parents and schools' staff in order to increase the quality of children's education. One recent experience about implementing programmes in Spain to enhance cooperation between parents and teachers is being performed in a primary school placed in the region of Asturias. The specific research objectives of this experience are of two kinds: 1) to assess school's cooperation needs as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students, and 2) to organize some activities to answer these demands, and from which most parents, teachers and students could benefit (intervention). The study follows a Cooperative Action-Research methodology because we have built a working team of people directly involved in the reality analized -the school-: parents, teachers and students, who are helped by a university researcher in analyzing and promoting parents-teachers partnership at school. Among the activities performed are: building the action-research team, data collection, analysing results and needs, and performing some programs to improve parents-children relationships, and parents and children knowledge about studying skills.

Key words: *family-school partnership, action-research methodology*

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Dra. Raquel-Amaya Martínez González
Departamento de CC. Educación. Universidad de Oviedo
España

1. THE SPANISH POLICY CONTEXT THAT AFFECTS FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Parents' involvement in schools has been legislated in Spain since 1970 throughout several Education Laws: Parents' Associations at Schools and parents' participation in the School Council are the main activities parents perform in the context of the schools. These are important areas of involvement, but, they do not always represent a real and friendly partnership.

2. THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

The school is located in the central part of Gijón, an industrial city in the northen coast of Spain. It comprises children of predominantly middle class families from kindergarden to grade 8, and has an enrollment of aproximately 800 students.

It is a well organized school where teachers are open to develop innovative programs; in fact there are some programs which are being developed at the moment: Early French, Environmental Education, ...

Relationships between parents and teachers are friendly in the school, and representatives of both, parents and teachers, have been interested in performing this international project. It has meant the first time that parents, teachers, students and representatives from Oviedo University have discussed together in the school about the state of parents-teachers cooperation.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main questions have been the following:

- Is it possible to find a public school where administrators, teachers, and parents are interested in developing the project?
- Is parents-teachers partnership a main characteristic of the school?
- Is it feasible to establish a permanent seminar in the school with parents, teachers and students, coordinated by a university researcher, to exchange ideas about cooperation and to organize activities to improve it?
- Which are the school's cooperation needs, as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students?
- What kind of activities can be performed at school to answer parents', teachers' and students' demands?

4. OBJECTIVES

- To build a permanent research seminar with parents, teachers, students and a university coordinator, to exchange ideas about parents-teachers partnership and education
- To assess the school's cooperation needs, as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students,
- To organize some activities to answer these demands, and from which most parents, teachers and students could benefit.

5. DESIGN AND PLAN

5.1. 1992-93 ACADEMIC YEAR: ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL'S COOPERATION NEEDS

5.1.1. Organization of the research

- Introduction of the project to Parents and Teachers
- Building the action-research team with parents, teachers and students
- Learning about action-research

5.1.2. Assessment of school's cooperation needs

5.1.2.1. Activities performed:

- Analysing current parents-teachers collaboration activities
- Adapting questionnaires for Parents, Teachers and Students to the culture of the school
- Data collection through:

    1. *School's documents and reports*
    2. *Discussions in the team*
    3. *The sessions written reports*
    4. *Observation*
    5. *Questionnaires for Parents, Teachers and Students.*

4. Data analysis

5.1.2.2. Some results: Graphics attached

5.1.2.3. Needs and demands detected:

A. FROM PARENTS AND TEACHERS:

- Need to talk more about their respective educative objectives for the children in order to put them in common
- Need to meet more often to plan answers to the students' problems
- Need to meet more often to talk about children's positive behaviors, and not just about the negative one
- Need to learn effective ways of:
  - improving parents-children relationship
  - helping children to develop thinking and studying skills

B. FROM STUDENTS:

- Teachers should care more about their personal lives and circunstances
- Parents should meet more often with teachers

5.2. 1993-94 ACADEMIC YEAR: ORGANIZATION AND PERFORMANCE OF ACTIVITIES TO ANSWER THE NEEDS DETECTED

- The "open doors day" at school
- The programme to let parents know how to improve their relationship with their children: The Systematic Training for Effective Parents programme (STEP), by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay
- The programme to inform parents and students about studying skills.

6. RESULTS. OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED AFTER TWO YEARS OF WORK

- Objective 1 was fully well achieved because we were able to build a permanent seminar at school with parents, teachers, students and a university coordinator to exchange ideas about parents-teachers partnership and education.
- Objective 2 was also achieved because we were able to assess the school's cooperation needs as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students.
- Objective 3 was partially achieved because although we were able to organize some activities to answer the demands detected, most parents whose children have behaviour problems or very low academic achievement did not participate.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO THE SCHOOL

Among them are the following:

- To realize that before the project started there were at school more collaboration activities than expected.
- To be aware that those previous activities were not enough and had to be complemented with some others.
- The school has increased the variety of activities it offers to its community.
- The school has now a very active group of people interested in increasing and improving cooperation.
- A more positive attitude between parents and teachers is observed now at school.
- Some parents have learnt to conduct groups of parents, which has made them feel proud of themselves, specially because they had never though they would be able to do so.
- Through taking part in the programmes developed, more parents are becoming interested in being involved in future activities, not just to learn throught participating in them, but also to contribute to their organization.
- Teachers, on the other hand, are also open to organize activities to increse communication with families.
- THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION has been that *parents and teachers in the school would like to continue working on this field,* which represents a great success.

8. LIMITATIONS

The main limitations have been the following:

- The dependence of the team on the facilitator, which may make the experience stop when the facilitator is not available
- The doubt about the long term effects experiences like this can have on the school
- The doubt about the generalization of the effects to other schools. Unless this experience is extended in terms of time and to more communities, the generalization of the effects will be almost impossible to achieve.